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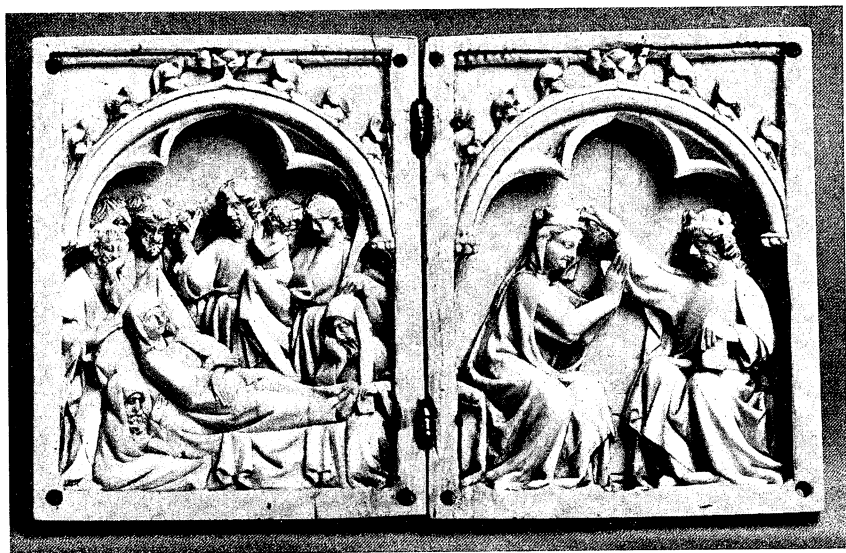


FIG. 1 IVORY DIPTYCH, FRENCH, FOURTEENTH CENTURY

RECENT ACCESSIONS

THE DECORATIVE ARTS

A SMALL beginning has been made, looking to the development of our collections of the smaller decorative crafts of the middle ages (jewelry, bronzes, ivories, and enamels) by the purchase of several early pieces. One of these is a German bronze crucifix of the Romanesque period, made about 1100 (fig. 2), in which the transition from the Byzantine idea of Christ triumphant to the later Italian and northern idea of the suffering Christ is clearly marked. The figure is supported rather than hung upon the cross, the feet resting on a large block which relieves the tension of the arms; the head is bent forward as in the crucifixes of a later date; but the expressive features suggest victory rather than the agony of suffering. When compared with French work of the same period this crucifix is much more primitive in style and rude in workmanship. The reverse of the cross is ornamented with

five discs, the central medallion bearing the figure of the lamb and those in the four arms of the cross inclosing the symbols of the four evangelists. The surface was originally gilt, and it is possible that it may have been enameled, although in Germany bronzes of this kind were often made without the enamel finish.

Another important piece is a bronze candlestick (fig. 3) of twelfth-century French workmanship, which in technique shows greater virtuosity than that of the crucifix, and which in composition is typical of the boldness and elegance of the country and period to which it belongs. A winged sphinx, with erect female head and a tail terminating in a dog's head, supports on its back the stick (now missing) for the candle. It illustrates admirably the freedom of the early art in which human and animal forms are combined with an imagination convincing in its reality, and at the same time it shows to what an extent these forms were used for decorative purposes

without the naturalistic details employed in later periods to attain a realistic effect. With all its simplicity it reveals clearly the ideas of a great period full of belief in supernatural beings, and the ability of the early craftsman to express this belief with power and beauty not only in the higher forms of art, but in ordinary household utensils.

To the thirteenth century belongs a pyx, or reliquary box, of gilt bronze enameled in different colors, made at Limoges. This form of pyx, with the high roof, was in use during a long period. It was first made in the antique period, was later taken by the early Christian art, afterward by the Romanesque, and it was not until the Gothic period that the shape was completely changed. The present piece represents the end of the development. Reliquaries of this type were made in large quantities at Limoges, but few remain in as good condition as this, with the cross on the top and the bird head lock. It is seldom also that one is found of such charming color, in which the prevailing white tone is used as a background for the medallions bearing the monogram of Christ.

Most valuable acquisitions are two French ivory diptychs of the second half of the fourteenth century, a time when art instilled into subjects of a serious nature a more worldly and joyous sense in compositions harmonious and rhythmic in their lines. Diptychs like these were

made for private devotions in the home or for traveling; they were also used on the small side altars of the churches where they were displayed to the people during Mass. Scenes from the Passion and from the life of the Virgin were especially popular, the

latter being typical of the culture of the fourteenth century, corresponding in a way to the effeminate tendency of the times. In this way our two diptychs are typical examples, one representing four scenes from the Passion, the other the Death and Coronation of the Virgin (fig. 1). In the first the arrangement begins at the bottom on the left with the Flagellation, which is followed by Christ Bearing the Cross, the third group represents the Crucifixion and the Entombment, the scenes terminating at the lower right side, a characteristic arrangement. The composition and the different motives are not inventions of the artist, but are drawn

according to tradition and repeated with variations. In the Flagellation, for instance, the figure of Christ is always chained to a small central column, the feet lightly poised on the ground, and in the Crucifixion the figure of Christ is always turned to the left, while above the cross are seen the sun and moon, sometimes symbolized by two angels. In the Entombment, Christ is invariably held above the tomb by two men while Joseph of Arimathea dresses the wound. The same may be said of the Death of the Virgin, in

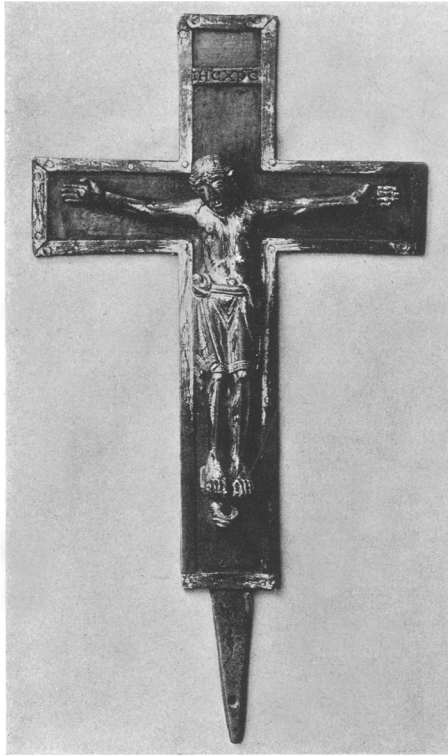


FIG. 2. BRONZE CRUCIFIX, GERMAN, ABOUT ELEVENTH CENTURY

which Christ always stands back of the bed, holding in His arms the soul of the Virgin, symbolized by a small nude child. To us the grace of the figures seems to lend itself more properly to the scenes from the life of the Virgin than to the Passion scenes. In execution, the diptych with the Virgin is perhaps the more refined of the two, and in its deeply cut relief it expresses the plastic feeling better than the other.

Compared with the work just mentioned, a silver gift relief of an apostle shows the steadier and stronger style of the early Gothic period of about 1300. Very likely this piece, which may have belonged to a large crucifix, was made in Italy, if not in Germany.

Three silver plaquettes, inlaid with niello (fig. 4) of Italian fifteenth-century workmanship, are important as examples of the art from which that of engraving on copper plates developed. It was a short step from this form to the engraved plates filled with fluid color instead of the niello, and but one step further to the taking of impressions from these plates. The effect of the plaquettes is very similar to the first Florentine engravings. The figures of the composition are placed against a black net ground and stand out in lighter colors in one plane without any depth of tone. The two round pieces belong to the earliest period of this kind of work, dating from the beginning of the century. They represent two apostles, and probably form part of a series belonging to the ornamentation of a crucifix or a casket. The other, showing two nude figures with some allegorical meaning, is of North Italian origin and belongs to the second half of the century.

A delicate piece of German workmanship in translucent enamel on silver is a thimble, dated 1577, probably made at Augsburg. The top is ornamented with two crests in-

laid on a red background, one with the monogram of Christ, the other with two flowers; the letters V. M. N. (*vergiss mein nicht*) show that it was doubtless intended as a wedding gift. On the band is a hunting scene with two dogs chasing a hare.

To the second half of the sixteenth century, also, belong three pewter plates; one decorated with figures of the Electors, another with the coats

of arms of the twelve Swiss cantons, and the third, of an unusual etched technique, with representations of the four Evangelists, by N. Hochheimer. An iron box shows the same kind of etching, much used in South Germany and executed in remarkably fine drawing on this hard material.

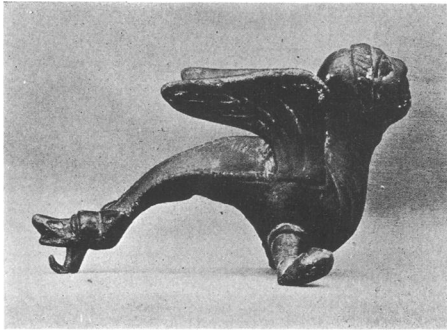


FIG. 3. CANDLESTICK, FRENCH, TWELFTH CENTURY

The last of this group of recent purchases is a typical example of the small decorative arts of Spain, a miniature diptych carved in wood illustrating scenes from the Passion and placed on a background of delicate feathers in brilliant blue. The enamel on the outside does not show the finest work, but is very effective, the bright colors being especially characteristic of the rich color effects found in Spanish art of this period.

W. R. V.

A CARVED CHAIR FROM THE TYROL.—Furniture of the Romanesque period is no longer in existence, but some idea of its appearance may be derived from pieces found in the valleys of Switzerland and the Tyrol, where the oldest Teutonic forms were preserved as late as the Gothic and Renaissance periods. An interesting example of this kind, recently acquired, is an arm-chair with a movable seat and a reclining back, which would seem to prove that it was used for operating purposes. The back and sides are elaborately carved with coiled serpents having dragon heads, in the style of the Celtic or Scandinavian

art; the motives on the back are more characteristic of the Renaissance—a double eagle surrounded by a circle supported by two lions rampant (similar designs are found in the embroideries and fillet work of the Tyrol of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries); the floral sprays be-

tween them were originally derived from Romanesque arrangements, but in their naturalistic form are characteristic of the later Renaissance. This chair, with its tones of polished brown wood, probably dates from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. W. R. V.

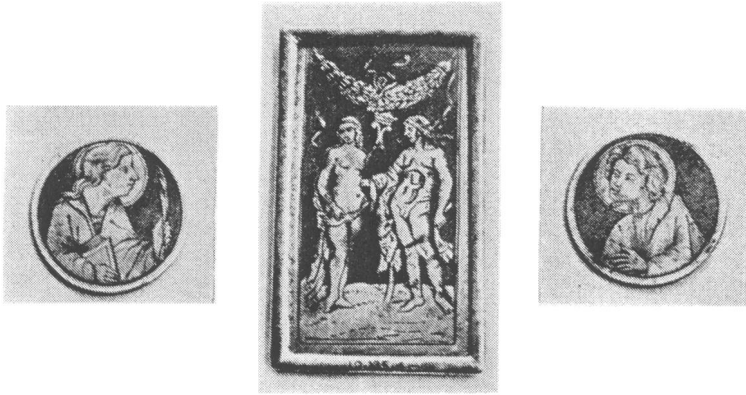


FIG. 4. NIELLO, ITALIAN, FIFTEENTH CENTURY

NOTES

REARRANGEMENT OF THE GALLERIES.—The late Italian pictures belonging to the Museum, together with two loans, have been hung in Gallery 29 in accordance with a plan for the arrangement of the pictures by countries and epochs. The pictures on loan are *Lazarus and the Rich Man*, an important work by Jacopo da Ponte (called Bassano) belonging to Mr. D. F. Platt, and a spirited battle picture attributed to Borgognone, lent by Mrs. C. C. Ruthrauff.

Roughly speaking, these pictures range from the latter part of the sixteenth to the latter part of the eighteenth century. In Venice, more than elsewhere in Italy, the late painters—the artists of the so-called decadence—were the most interesting. In this small group the Venetians are rep-

resented by *The Last Supper*, of the School of Tintoretto, belonging to the Museum, by Mr. Platt's Bassano—both among the latest manifestations of the direct tradition of the great time—and by a fair showing of the works of the eighteenth century by Ricci, Tiepolo, and Guardi. In the older paintings the spirit of conservatism is evident; the influence of the great masters appears in the composition as well as in the color, which is rich and sober, though a little pompous, perhaps, in distinction to the gayety of Tiepolo or the blond freshness of Guardi. The paintings by the latter artists make up in charm what they lack in seriousness of purpose. In the three canvases by Tiepolo, here shown, the virtuosity of the craftsmanship and the purity of the flower-like color lead one to forget that the artist's